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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MUSLIM IV HITS HOME RUN TELLING AMERICA'S STORY

1. SUMMARY. Speaking to large audiences of Mozambican Muslims, Abdul Carimo Sau told America's story better than any American could have done. Sau, the Vice President of the Islamic Council of Mozambique, recently returned from the three-week International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) on Religion and the Community, and on August 22 appeared on a much-discussed local Islamic radio call-in talk show with the PAO. Two days later, he led a PAS-hosted roundtable on his visit to the U.S., a program attended by the leadership of the Islamic community and Muslim students and broadcast live from start to finish on the same radio station. Sau has demonstrated compellingly the immediate impact that the IVLP can have and how the program's long-term goals dovetail nicely with a post's short-term agenda. END SUMMARY

ACCEPTS PAO INVITATION TO GO ON AIR

2. On August 18, the PAO and PAS staff debriefed Sau upon his return from the IVLP. Sau spoke warmly and openly about the program, underscoring that he witnessed a highly religious nation, pluralistic and respectful of faiths, regardless of tradition or practice. Pressed to cite a criticism, he averred that the sometimes hectic schedule did not adapt well to the African sensibility of extended meetings and meals. He would have preferred more time to talk. He immediately accepted the PAO's invitation to appear jointly on a previously arranged call-in talk show on Radio Imane (a station for the Maputo Muslim community of perhaps 100,000).

3. On August 22 at 9:00 AM, Sau and the PAO went on the air. What was intended as a one-hour interview with call-in questions lasted two hours and won an invitation for a follow-up program. Sau described his trip, emphasizing again the religious nature of the American public in general and the thriving condition of Islam in the U.S. in particular. He said that it was his first trip to the U.S. and that Americans were in reality much different from the preconceived stereotype he had derived from mass media. Islam in fact is thriving in America, he declared, in part thanks to the separation of religion and state, evidence that freedom of religion in a pluralistic society can only benefit Muslims. In response to a question, he noted that concerns of Islam in Mozambique, such as fear of wearing the veil in public, are non-issues in an America where tolerance for differences and respect for religiosity prevail.

TAKING THE HARD QUESTIONS

4. On August 24, PAS hosted Sau for a roundtable. Some 40 leaders of the Islamic community attended with a handful of Muslim students. Radio Imane, in close coordination with PAS, aired the entire two-hour roundtable live, including several call-in questions from radio listeners. Sau went into depth about his trip. Reiterating his earlier theme about the religiosity of Americans, he cited figures to this effect, but his anecdotes brought home the point. His meals with Americans, he said, all opened with a blessing. He described the vast role that religion plays in supporting social services at the local level, taking San Diego's "Father Joe" (Carroll) as an example. (Carroll is a Catholic priest who runs a large, self-supporting homeless center.) He was most impressed by the giving nature of Americans, the immense amounts they donate to charities.

THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

5. Sau skillfully addressed questions about U.S. policy in the Middle East. He emphasized that the U.S. was the only party trusted by both the Palestinians and the Israelis, and this occupied a necessary role as go-between. Their dispute resembles more a family feud that has raged for generations in that both sides have almost forgotten the original issues of land; but don't think of it as a war of faiths. Similarly, the conflict in Iraq goes back centuries, long before the U.S. ever arrived. It is not a war about religion, but power and injustice, that only a fair apportionment of power and justice will resolve. He also addressed the War on Terror and the extent that September 11 as well

as the acts of terror that have taken place in Madrid, London, and elsewhere have impacted the America populace.

16. American is not monolithic, he reiterated. An intense debate about the Iraq War is going on in the U.S. Congress and in the media every day. Democrats have criticized the war from the beginning, with Republicans generally supporting President Bush. He called attention to the protest taking place near the President's Texas ranch, and another one that he witnessed in front of the White House. Where in pre-war Iraq, or even Mozambique, would a leader tolerate a protest almost on his doorstep?

#### SHATTERING THE MYTH OF AN EMBATTLED ISLAM IN AMERICA

17. The audience at the roundtable asked several questions about the state of Islam in the U.S. Here, Sau noted that every medium-sized city now has a mosque, and that Islam claims as many adherents as Judaism. Wearing traditional Muslim garb, he experienced no discrimination; to the contrary, he observed that many of the issues that face Muslims in other parts of the world do not exist in the U.S. He spoke about the role of pressure groups in U.S. politics, in response to a question about the domestic sources of U.S. foreign policy and the perceived failure of Muslims to organize as Jews and Christians have. The simple fact is, he argued, that most Muslims are recent immigrants or children of immigrants and have not yet sunk the political roots of longer-established faiths.

#### UTAH IMPRESSES

18. Utah provided the biggest and best surprise. He had never before envisioned an America where religion was dominant in daily life to the extent that an entire university (Brigham Young) could ban smoking and drinking, among other things. He assured the audience that if he were to send his children to study in the U.S., he would send them to Brigham Young University and recommended that other Muslims think accordingly. What is important, he added, is that religion be respected. In the U.S., he saw evidence of that general respect.

19. COMMENT. Sau hit a home run. He's a far better spokesman for our message than any American, because he's Mozambican, Muslim, and influential within his own community. His low-key, articulate style underscores a truism in public diplomacy, that getting others to tell America's story is often the most effective technique. The ability and willingness to criticize us from time to time gives him credibility, lending even more weight to his positive views about the U.S. As in this case, we will use mass media when available, the PAO and other Americans when appropriate, and influential locals when possible. Hats off to ECA for a signal success.

La Lime